



U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of Information



Release - Sunday, February 16, 1919.

-----  
: Editors: This article is :  
: submitted for your Sunday :  
: edition and it is sent to no :  
: other paper in your city. :  
-----

CAMPING ON THE PRAIRIE DOG'S TRAIL.  
- - -

Washington, D. C.

Perhaps you wouldn't think that

a prescription like this could have anything to do with winning the Great War:

Strychnine.....	A certain quantity.
Saccharin.....	do.
Starch.....	do.
Sodium bicarbonate.....	do.
Some kind of sirup.....	do.
Any kind of good oats.....	One bag.
Water to moisten.	
Mix thoroughly and distribute	
properly in the right place.	

No. Not the way you think. Certainly NOT. You ought to know that our folks don't fight that way. Besides, the Huns were going, not coming, and hence not open to treatment by the poisoned bait method. This prescription is for another kind of dog.

Out in Chaves County, New Mexico, a new county agent went on the job last June, and taking a look around to see who among his constituents was most nearly in line with the policies of Wilhelmstrasse, he fixed upon the prairie dog as being the Kaiser's best bet in Chaves County. So he threw himself into a campaign for the eradication of prairie dogs.

It happened that the Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture had a man on the ground, a part of its New Mexico organization, and the new county agent went in to help stage the war on this destructive pest. The county commissioners were persuaded to pay the salary of a county director of eradication, who worked through the county agent's office. The State Council of Defense furnished strychnine free for the treatment of crop lands. The ranchmen supplied strychnine for the treatment of the range, and in some cases men and horses for the distribution of the poisoned bait.

Half-Million Acres Sown with Poison.

In the ensuing campaign over 12,000 acres of crop lands and nearly half a million acres of range were sown with the deadly oats.

It's no small chore to sow poisoned oats over between four and five hundred thousand acres of arid land. It's a man-sized job, and a job far enough removed from the humdrum routine of county agent work to give a good idea of the infinite variety of aspects that American agricultural activities may assume. Take, for example, the work of eradication on the Turkey Track Ranch.

Turkey Track Ranch, if transplanted from New Mexico to Europe, would make a good sized principality. You can get so far away from ranch headquarters that you can't get home till to-morrow, and still find yourself riding range that comes within the sphere of influence of Turkey Track Ranch. So the eradication of prairie dogs on the scale demanded by Turkey Track Ranch necessitated the organization of a mobile expeditionary force.

The ranchman contributed toward outfitting this expedition one "chuck" wagon, one grain wagon, six mules to draw the same, thirty mounts for the grain distributors, a crew of about a dozen men, and strychnine ad. lib. The representative of the Biological Survey looked after mixing the poisoned and directing the work.

This outfit, flung out in skirmish line across the mesa, swept the range day after day, each man with a bag of poisoned oats slung from the pommel of his saddle, and each scattering a dose about each hole at the rate of about a quart to 40 burrows, whenever he found himself in the vicinity of a "dog town." The wagons followed, and each night the riders camped wherever they happened to be when night fell.

How the Dog's Work Begins.

In such work the activities of the day begin at dawn, when the cook rolls out and makes a crackling fire of mesquite roots in a previously prepared hole in the ground. Having garnished this fire with the lids of sundry Dutch ovens, the cook prepares materials for a breakfast of the kind that may be counted on to "stick to the ribs" -- biscuits, fried potatoes, bacon or beefsteak, and coffee may be taken as a representative menu -- and when the fire has burned down to a bed of coals he puts these edibles into his Dutch ovens, claps on their sizzling hot lids, and banks them with glowing coals.

Meanwhile the "boys" have crawled out of their blankets and have performed their matutinal ablutions in water siphoned from a barrel mounted on the front

the chuck wagon.

The single word "Chuck!" shouted by the cook, brings to public attention the fact that breakfast is ready. The serving thereof consists merely of lifting the lids of the ovens. The men gather around, each with a granite plate, a tin cup, a knife, fork, and spoon, and do the selfserve act, each passing from oven to oven and helping himself.

Breakfast over, the horse wrangler rounds up the mounts, the boys form a corral by stretching lariat ropes from hand to hand, and the wrangler ropes a mount for each rider. There are three horses per man, to be ridden in half-day relays.

By the time the boys are in the saddle the "prairie dog man" -- that is to say, the representative of the United States Department of Agriculture -- has the distributing sacks ready, each filled with about 25 pounds of oats, duly treated with strychnine. Each rider ties one of these sacks to his saddle horn, and the cavalcade moves off across the mesa in search of "dog towns."

Such, briefly sketched, is the color of that branch of American agricultural activities which has to do with the war against the humble but multitudinous prairie dog. In setting and properties it savors of the Wild West movies, but its dividends are paid in good red beef.

#### What Saving Amounts to in Acres.

To date, with some reports not yet in, range aggregating 443,060 acres has been treated in the Chaves County prairie-dog campaign. Since prairie dogs usually destroy at least a tenth of the grass on the range, this means a saving of some 44,306 acres of grazing, worth thousands of dollars to the ranchmen.

The work of eradication conducted on the farms of the county has covered an area aggregating over 16,000 acres, of which over 12,000 acres were in crops, the remainder being range land treated to prevent reinfestation of adjacent crop lands. Thirty-five farmers who cooperated in this work already report a saving of over \$4,000 as a result of this campaign.

Thus, in far Chaves County, five thousand miles from the front, a county agent allied with a great State and Federal movement was able to do his bit toward winning the war by setting folks to broadcasting poisoned oats. No report on casualties is forthcoming, but results are so obvious that the farmers and ranchmen of Chaves County propose that the strychnine prescription, adopted provisionally as a war measure, shall be made a regular feature of their permanent peace program until prairie dogs are no more.

###